

Article

Israel and Lebanon: Relations Under Stress

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Abstract

This article provides an analysis of the course of Israeli-Lebanese relations and its purpose is to shed light on the contacts between the Maronites in Lebanon and the State of Israel. It argues that the primary reason for the Maronites' willingness to cooperate with the Jews was the fear that the rising tide of Arab nationalism in Lebanon would have adverse effects on their survival as a religious minority. Moreover, it demonstrates that these contacts laid the background for cooperation between the two communities which survived the vicissitudes of the Lebanese civil wars and still plays a role in Israeli foreign policy.

Keywords

Foreign policy, Israel–Lebanon relations, Maronites, Jews, minorities

Introduction

Israel's relations with Lebanon were marked by instability and inconsistency¹. They were affected primarily by the sectarian nature of the latter. Ruled by Christian Maronites Lebanon has a large number of Muslims, Sunnis as well as Shi'as, in addition to Druze, Greek Catholics, Greek Orthodox and other minority groups. The leaders of the Jewish community in Palestine (Yishuv) began seeking an alliance with the Maronites in 1920. Such a plan was in accordance with their policy of reaching out to the non-Muslim minorities in the region, to neutralize the impact of the Muslim majority in the region.² The Lebanese leaders were well aware of the Zionist objectives and some were receptive to the idea, while others saw it as a devious scheme adopted by the Jews to enhance their expansionist goals.

Commenting on this policy the Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt writes:

Their [the Jews] plans had long been to encourage the rise of nationalist sectarian groups that surround the Jewish state and that have no independence; a Druze state,

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an Alawaite state, a Maronite state, a Kurdish state etc.—this plan was conceived prior to the existence of the state of Israel but it was not made public thereafter. (Jumblatt, 2002, p. 160)

Just like the Peripheral Alliance project promoted by Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion who sought to establish ties with Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia, which surround the Arab states, the plan to support the Maronites was part of a strategy designed to provide security of the Jewish state.

One of the Israeli leaders who supported the plan was Moshe Sharett who later dismissed the idea as “an adventurous speculation upon the well-being and existence of others” (Cited in Makinde, 2018). Although the plan was discussed on many occasions no serious attempt was made by the Israeli leaders to assess how it could be implemented and it was not until after the Lebanese civil war of 1975–1976 that actual steps were taken to implement it. By then however, it was clear that the Maronites were no longer a majority in the country and were in no position to wield power even with foreign help (Ajami, 1985, p. 779).

In 1948, Lebanon joined other Arab states in the Palestine War that ended with their defeat. Following the Armistice Agreements of 1949, the northern border became quiet and little attention was given to Lebanon. Israel made no attempt to annex Lebanese territory it had captured during the War or change the status quo but it intervened occasionally to prevent the infiltration of Palestinians and Arab nationalists while it continued to support the Christians who remained dominant in the government. Israel's actions were sporadic and never constituted a part of a well-planned strategy. The first incident which Israel faced occurred in 1950, when a Lebanese aircraft crossed into its air space. This incident will be discussed later in this essay (Schulze, 1995, p. 919).

Apart from isolated incidents where infiltrators crossed the border into Israel little happened in the early 1950s to justify a major operation. By the mid-1950s, Lebanon was deeply affected by the pan-Arab tide caused by the rise of President Gamal Abd al-Nasser in Egypt. Lebanon demonstrated its sympathy toward Egypt during the Suez Affair of 1956 and praised US President Dwight Eisenhower's decision to order the British, the French and the Israelis to withdraw from the Egyptian territory. But when the Six-Day War erupted in 1967 Lebanon did not participate. Israel's policy remained ambiguous ever since; recognizing Lebanon's sovereignty while doubting its ability to become a robust state (Barak, 2010, pp. 165, 182). While no attempt was made by either side to change the status quo, the plan to establish an alliance with the Maronites was left in the back burner until the mid-1970s, when it was too late.

This essay attributes the failure of Israeli diplomacy in Lebanon to the following reasons; first, the plan to establish an alliance with the Maronites was never taken seriously and was not pursued with vigor; second, the demographic changes in Lebanon, which led to an increase in the Shi'a population and the formation of Hezbollah that not only turned into a significant military force but also to a highly active political party in Lebanon, curtailed the government's ability to mend fences with Israel; third, the arrival of the Palestinians whose number increased significantly in the wake of their expulsion from Jordan in 1970, made it harder

for the Lebanese government to conduct free negotiations with Israel; and fourth, lack of active US support for the normalization process stifled its progress until the present. Furthermore, the attempts to establish connections between the two sides were marred by the fashion in which the negotiations were conducted.

Reference to alliance between Israel and the Maronites remained sporadic and there was never a consensus among the leaders on both sides on the methods by which it could be implemented.³ Both countries dealt with each other through low-ranking officials while the Maronites remained too concerned about the reaction of the Muslims in their country. Besides, the precarious nature of the Lebanese political system where leaders had to maintain popularity among their voters, discouraged them from implementing a plan, which was opposed not only by the pan-Arab nationalists but also by many Christians.

In his study of political parties Maurice Duverger had noted that “In the parliamentary regime the government must find support from a coalition of associated parties: their alliance is always uneasy and intrigues are perpetually being hatched in the lobbies of parliament to break up the existing combination and replace it by a new one” (Duverger, 1955, p. 400). Such assertion applies to both Lebanon and Israel. However, in Israel’s case there was less disagreement over a strategic decision, which emanated from Ben-Gurion who was so closely identified with Israel’s security, while in Lebanon most Muslims saw this plan as a betrayal of the Arab cause and many Maronites regarded it as flashy and risky. Furthermore, the prominence of the press in Lebanon acted as a deterrent on the leaders.

Robert Michels’ observation that the democratic press can be used by the leader to attack his or her rival because at the least it can “serve to raise a dust-storm” can help illustrate the dilemma that the contenders for the presidency in Lebanon had to face (Michels, 1959, p. 132). Neither Émile Éddé who served as president until 1943 and who was in favor of a small Christian state tied to France, nor his successor Bishara al-Khoury who was in favor of “Greater Lebanon” allied with the Arab countries could afford to pursue a course of action which might have alienated their voters.

In addition to analyzing the reasons for the plan’s failure, this essay deals with the Israel’s reentry into Lebanon in the aftermath of the civil war of 1975–1976, the reasons for its failure to implement the plan and lastly, the recent attempt by the US to mediate between the two countries in the negotiations regarding the division of the maritime natural gas reserves, which are likely to usher in a new period of understanding between the two countries.

The Early Contacts

With the Entente’s victory in World War I the question of who would rule Lebanon came to the fore. The Lebanese politicians who favored French rule formed the *Groupement Chrétien*, which included the Maronites Émile Éddé, Bishara al-Khoury, Joseph Jumayl, Charles Corm, the Greek Orthodox Petro Trad, Greek Catholic Michel Chiha, Protestant Ayub Tabet and a few others

(Epstein, 1943, p. 9). Concerned about the response of the Muslims in Lebanon most of whom identified with pan-Arab nationalist ideas and sought to construct a Muslim regime the group was open to the idea of establishing cordial relations with the Yishuv.

In March 1920, the Jewish Agency signed an agreement of economic cooperation with the Maronites and thereby initiated the contact with the Maronite Patriarch Elias Hoyek (Kaufman, 2001, p. 185). The idea of establishing a state for the Christians in Lebanon was first raised by the French consul Prosper Bourée in the 1830s but it was until the end of the World War I that the Lebanese delegation submitted a memorandum to a conference of a great powers in San Francisco asking its members to consider that possibility. Prominent among those who defended of idea was the author Pierre Rondot who argued that Lebanon was the only country in the region capable of effectively integrating all its minorities (Rondot, 1957, p. 659).

The early contacts between the Jews and the Maronites began by young men with little or no influence in their countries; the Jewish student Eliahu Eilath and the Maronite Albert Nakash who served as minister of economics and public works during the presidency of Charles Dabbas in 1926–1934 (Eilath, 1989, p. 193). Both joined the Phoenician Society established by Charles Corm and promoted the idea that Lebanon was closely linked to its Phoenician past (Eilath, 1989, p. 200). However, expect for declarations of good and willingness to cooperate with the Jews nothing concrete was done by the group.

When the persecution of Jews began in Germany in the middle 1930s, both Dabbas and the Maronite Patriarch Antonio Pierre Arida agreed to allow their entry into Lebanon (CZA, 1933, May 16). However, there is no evidence that they were willing to establish a Jewish settlement in Lebanon or that Jewish Agency ever made such proposal (Eisenberg, 1994, p. 77). The influence of the Jewish community in Washington may have played a role in encouraging the Maronite leaders to keep the dialogue going. Aware of the influence that the Jews wielded in Washington, the heads of the Maronite church sought financial aid from them by using their colleagues in Palestine as intermediaries (CZA, 1933, January 16).

The contacts continued throughout the 1930s but they lacked the intensity required to form a viable alliance. Both Ben-Gurion and Sharett met with Riyad al-Sulh who later became Lebanon's prime minister. Al-Sulh arrived in Jerusalem by the end of May or the beginning of June 1934 and told Ben-Gurion that he was willing to work toward Jewish–Arab understanding and act as a mediator (Ben-Gurion, 1975b, pp. 21–22).

Sharett recalled in his memoirs that on 23 May 1937 the Maronite politician Naguib Safir asked the Jews to support Monsignor Abdallah Khouri and Moussa Namour whose goal was to depose Éddé who tended to compromise with the Arab nationalists. Safir warned Sharett about the potential danger to the Maronites and the Jews if Palestine was to be divided and expressed his concern that the British might grant the Galilee to another Arab country and thereby divide the two communities. He argued that if the Jews wished to have a friendly Lebanese state on their border, they ought to help Khouri come to power. This was one of the opportunities which the Jewish Agency had to move closer to its main goal of

establishing an alliance with the Maronites but Sharett turned down the offer, saying that the Jews will discuss the matter with the Maronite Patriarch in due course (Sharett, 1971, pp. 141–142).

However, the contacts did cease and on 15 June 1937 Sharett noted that “A friendship between us and the Maronites in Lebanon is in the process of development” (Sharett, 1971, p. 197). He expressed his conviction that both the Jews and the Maronites could benefit from such cooperation (Sharett, 1971, p. 221). And when Lebanon refused to attend the Bloudan Conference, which was convened in Syria on 8 September 1937 to protest against the Peel Commission’s recommendation to partition Palestine, Sharett saw the move as a sign of willingness to start a dialogue (Sharett, 1971, p. 343). However, he gradually reached the conclusion that the idea was impractical and abandoned it altogether. General statements regarding friendship continued to be made by both sides but no concrete steps were taken.

On 22 June 1937 the Jewish statesman Chaim Weizmann met Éddé who told him that he would be interested in establishing friendly relations and that “Lebanon would be glad to have common borders with Jewish Palestine, if indeed the country was to be divided” (Eilath, 1989, p. 8). As a preliminary measure, Corm proposed to establish a Jewish–Lebanese friendship society while Nakash agreed to work on a joint dam building project on the Litani River; but as soon as the Jewish Agency began studying the proposals the French High Commissioner, Damien de Martel who was concerned about the reaction of the Syrian nationalists denounced it as “a British scheme in an American disguise” (Eilath, 1989, p. 202).

In February 1938, Lebanon’s Prime Minister Khayrredyn al-Ahdab arrived in Palestine where he met Sharett and asked that the Jews help by founding a newspaper to spread the news regarding Lebanon’s severe economic crisis (Sharett, 1972, pp. 37–38). He also asked for financial assistance. Sharett’s response makes it clear that neither he, nor any Jewish leader, was fully committed to the alliance proposal at that time. He told his guest that the Jews were concerned about being blamed for intervening in Lebanon and made it clear that they would help only in cases that benefit them directly and they can monitor closely (Sharett, 1972, p. 78).

In March 1938, the Jewish Agency sought to establish a settlement in Hanita, close to Lebanon’s border and there was need to obtain its approval for the arrival of a small expedition (Sharett, 1972, pp. 85, 90–91). Al-Ahdab told Sharett that his government will take all the necessary steps to maintain order in that region (Sharett, 1972, p. 91). According to Sharett, there were pro-Jewish elements in Lebanon, both among the Maronites and the Muslims. If that was indeed the case, then there were certainly conditions for cooperation but they were not exploited with vigor. Lebanon’s goodwill manifested itself by concrete steps to prevent the entry of infiltrators and weapons into Palestine (Sharett, 1972, p. 247).

According to Sharett, the friends of the Jews in Lebanon often advised the Jewish Agency (Sharett, 1974, p. 326). However, there is no indication in the documents available in the Israeli archives or in the memoirs of the personalities involved that these friends were indeed instrumental in the attempts to reach to the Maronites, nor is there any indication that the Jewish leaders seriously attempted

to rely on them as intermediaries. Éddé who saw Zionism as a natural ally against pan-Arabism met Weizmann in Paris, following the British victory over the Vichy forces in Syria (Eilath, 1989, p. 189). However, he was not reinstated to the presidency and his National Bloc gave way to the rise of the Constitutional Bloc led by Khouri who was even more willing to compromise with the Arab nationalists.

Evidently, the rivalry among the Lebanese leaders had the effect of preventing them from taking a bold initiative such as forging an alliance with the Jews. The differences of opinions regarding an alliance with the Jews did not remain confined to the presidential candidates. Even among the members of the Phoenician circle there was dissension; while Corm and Nakash were in Éddé's favor, Chiha supported Khouri (Eilath, 1989, p. 205). Yet both continued to talk about the need to form an alliance. In his diary of the 1948 War Ben-Gurion specifically mentioned that the Jews ought "to bring the Christians to rise" (Ben-Gurion, 1948, p. 505). He agreed that Sidon remain in Lebanon but insisted on the need to set the boundary at the Litani River (Ben-Gurion, 1931, p. 40). He also instructed the Foreign Ministry to look for ways to turn Lebanon into a friendly Christian state (Documents on Israeli Foreign Policy, Vol. XI, 1956, p. 536).

For a while, it seemed that Ben-Gurion's plan was about to materialize. The Maronites expressed their concern that the talks about Arab unity, which took place in Alexandria in 1944, would threaten their position in Lebanon. Their statements regarding the country's independence and their desire to establish cordial relations with their neighbors stood in stark contrast to what al-Sulh's government used to say until then, and they caused resentment among the Muslims in Lebanon (CZA, 1944, October 11). In a message to Weizmann from 28 April 1946 the Jewish Agency representative Ya'acov Katz mentioned that he met Arida in Lebanon where they explored the possibility of cooperation. He also mentioned that he met with the leaders of the Shi'a Mutawali community on the Lebanese border who expressed their willingness to work with the Jews and he asked not to miss that opportunity to establish connections with them (CZA, 1946, April 28). However, his message fell on deaf ears in the Jewish Agency.

According to the archival research done by the Israeli historian Benny Morris one of the leading Phalangists, Father Joseph Awad of Waterville Maine, approached Eliahu Ben-Horin, the Middle East affairs adviser of the American Zionist Emergency Council in September 1948 and asked for help in overthrowing the Lebanese government to force it to stay out of the Palestine War. It remained unclear what the response of the Israeli government was (Shipley, 1983, July 3).

The Relations After 1948

The events which preceded the Palestine War caused friction in the Jewish-Lebanese relations. Strict measures were imposed on Jews who were detained until the US intervened (FRUS, 1948, pp. 1017–1018). They were eventually released but only on the proviso that they return directly to the US (FRUS, 1948, pp. 1037–1040). Nevertheless, the Maronite fear that they would be

outnumbered by Muslims led them to continue making favorable statements regarding an alliance with the Jews. Their newspapers were replete with articles expressing concern about the country's future as member of the Arab League, the Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husseini's talk regarding the need to form a Palestinian government-in-exile, and his call to liberate the country from the British (CZA, 1946, June 18).

As the Maronites saw it, such plan was likely to isolate Lebanon and undermine their position. They feared that the British were planning to attach northern Palestine to Lebanon and thereby increase the number of Muslims in the country. To prevent such possibility Arida informed the British that the Maronites preferred that they detach the area south of the Litani River and thereby reduce the number of Muslims in Lebanon (CZA, 1948, October 2). In a letter to Britain's Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin, Arida asked to reconsider his decision (Patriarch to Bevin [CZA, S25/6319, 1946?]). This was one of numerous manifestations of discontent among the Maronites that encouraged them to consider the possibility of an alliance with Israel.⁴

Normally, meetings between Maronites and Jews dealt with specific issues involving a request to fund a certain project or to provide financial aid. For example, at a meeting with the Jewish Agency official Eliahu Sasson the Maronite priest Francis Mubarak asked the Agency to purchase a house in Jerusalem to serve as his center (CZA, 1946, April 1). Apart from that there were only general statements about cooperation made by Maronites. Another example was a visit by Monsignor A. Aquel to the US where he expressed his willingness to discuss the possibility of mutual activities (CZA, 1945, October 17). However, nothing significant came out of the proposal.

An agreement of cooperation between the Jewish Agency and the Maronite church was signed in 1946 and it established economic and cultural cooperation but no systematic efforts were made to turn it into a meaningful alliance. In the following year, Beirut's Archbishop Ignatius Mubarak submitted a memorandum to the UN expressing support for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine (Schulze, 1995, p. 920). He also declared that "Lebanon as well as Palestine would remain as permanent homes for the minorities in the Arab world" (Elis, 1999, p. 6.). However, apart from such general statements neither side went to any length to establish a viable connection. Another reason for the failure to establish a meaningful relationship was that the Maronites were far more divided over that issue than the Jews. While Hoyek and al-Kouhri were hostile to Israel, Ignatius Mubarak and Arida were sympathetic (Meir, pp. 21–22, CZA, S90/593). Generally, the heads of the small Maronite community in Palestine were more supportive.⁵ However, they had little influence over their coreligionists in Lebanon. Ignatius Mubarak's declaration in favor of the Zionist enterprise was greeted by the Yishuv as a sign of potential friendship and Jewish officials such as Yitzhak Ben Zvi was highly encouraged by it (Ben Zvi, 1946, April 4).

Ben-Gurion's plan during the Palestine war of 1948 was to fight the Lebanese army in a short campaign. In a speech to the ruling Mapai (the future Labor Party) Secretariat on 29 May 1948 he said that "there is a possibility that Christians in Lebanon would fight with us within two weeks" (cited in Ben-

Gurion, 1996b, p. 37). When the war began Lebanon supported the Palestinian Fawzi al-Qawuqji's Liberation Army (Documents on Israeli Foreign Policy, 1948, p. 310). However, the Lebanese army played no more than a minor role. Israel's main concern was that the Western Galilee would not fall into the Lebanese hands. In his letter to Sharett, Weizmann warned against such possibility (Documents on Israeli Foreign Policy, 1948, p. 226). And in another letter to Nahum Goldman, he wrote that "Western Galilee opens the way for the annexation of the whole Galilee to Israel" (cited in Documents on Israeli Foreign Policy, 1948, p. 163) This was the ultimate goal and it was achieved in that war. Speaking to the members of the Haganah's general staff, Ben-Gurion once again made his main goal in Lebanon clear by saying, "We must establish a Christian state whose southern border will be the Litani. [River]" (cited in Makinde, 2018).

Settling the Palestinians in Lebanon was another factor which stood on the way of better relations with Israel. The resistance to such solution was particularly keen among the Maronites who feared that opposition to their rule would increase and even Muslims have expressed their objection to it (Khashan, 1994, pp. 14–15). Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the Palestine War of 1948 al-Khoury found it imperative to call on the Lebanese to assist the 130,000 Palestinians who arrived in the country (Sfeir, 2008, p. 123).

Many Lebanese continued to hold a grudge against Israel, arguing that during the Palestine War of 1948 the Jews conquered Maronite territories of Ikrit and Bir'am in the north ('Attallāh, 2013, p. 153). There were even those who went to the extent of blaming the Palestinian leaders for making concession to Israel at the expense of the refugees (Isma'il, 2007, p. 261). One commentator remarked that: "it is possible to say that Tarshīhah which included a significant part of the inhabitants of Bourge al-Barajanah refugee camp turned into Ma'ilot with the consent of the Palestinian legal institutions" (Jalūl, 1994, pp. 109–110). This was one of Israel's misdeeds which made it difficult to establish neighborly relations with Lebanon.

In January 1949, the Lebanese government began negotiating with the Israelis with a view to end the latter's presence in southern Lebanon. The Lebanese Foreign Minister stated that he was prepared to go to almost any length, short of signing a document formally recognizing Israel's existence (FRUS, 1949, p. 641). The Lebanese government did not wish to alienate the Arab states by negotiating a separate peace agreement with Israel. Nor did it seek to alienate the large number of Palestinian refugees in the country. Lebanon had the largest number of Palestinian refugees outside Palestine; out of 630,000, Lebanon had 131,000 as opposed 99,000 in Transjordan, 85,000 in Syria, and 5000 in Iraq (FRUS, 1949, p. 935).

Given the poverty and lack of resources, the Lebanese government had good reasons to reject the Israeli proposal to absorb more Palestinians. This became quite evident when The Palestine Conciliation Commission concluded that only Lebanon and Transjordan would have difficulty in assimilating them (FRUS, 1949, p. 938). The Lebanese argued that their country was overpopulated (FRUS, 1949, p. 966). Furthermore, the Maronites regarded the Palestinian presence as a security issue and feared that their settlement would lead to empowering the

Muslims (Al-Kālib, 2001, p. 33). It was for reason that they insisted that those Palestinians who resided in Lebanon refrain from keeping heavy weapons in their arsenal (Abdallah, 2008, pp. 56–57).

According to the Armistice Agreement concluded on 24 March 1949, both countries agreed not to resort to force; the international boundary became the cease-fire line, each side could maintain no more than 1500 men and a mixed boundary commission was formed to monitor the border.⁶ Seeking to achieve permanent stability in the region, Lebanon proposed to mediate in the Arab–Israeli conflict but the Israelis turned down the proposal (*Hamevaser*, 1949, June 14). The first incident, which caused tension between the two countries occurred in July 1950 when a Lebanese civilian aircraft crossed into Israeli air space (*Ha'aretz*, 1950, July 20). Two passengers were killed by the Israeli pilot and seven injured. Though minor, the incident caused resentment in Lebanon, the government filed a complaint with the UN and the press was replete with articles condemning the action. The crisis was resolved but not before the US intervened. It was at the same year that the head of Maronite *Kata'ib*, Elias Rababi asked Israel for financial assistance in the elections that were scheduled to take place in 1951.⁷ He was granted a small sum of US\$3,000 and that led critics to argue that Israel primary concern was to obtain a peace treaty with Lebanon (Schulze, 1995, pp. 924, 927–929).

When Israelis began traveling to Lebanon the authorities followed the general Arab practice of denying them visa (FRUS, 1950, p. 286). Normally, the Lebanese government tried to enforce the regulations but they were generally ignored. Nevertheless, the official restrictions on shipping and movement of passengers continued to cause tension (FRUS, 1950, p. 734). Normally, the official statements made by Lebanese statesmen were critical of Israel and were meant to ward off criticisms from the Arab states. The tension did not cease, however, and there was a growing feeling among Lebanese officials that Israel was not living up to its responsibility to address the plight of the Palestinians. Noticing the disappointment that prevailed in Beirut, in the autumn of 1950 the US Minister in Lebanon Lowell C. Pinkerton told the Secretary of State, that “the Government and much of the press and public of Lebanon now hardened their attitude on the question of a settlement with Israel” (FRUS, 1950, p. 1111).

In 1953, the Israeli *chargé d'affaires* in Washington, Reuven Shiloah stated that “From time to time the Lebanese wish to demonstrate their nationalism, and then an incident occurs ... But the relations with Lebanon are generally not our utmost concern.”⁸ Lebanon was one of the first Arab countries to protest against Washington’s decision to provide aid to Israel (FRUS, 1951, p. 599). On most occasions it followed the general Arab response to every Israeli action. Among issues which caused friction between the two countries, the Palestinian problem loomed the largest. This becomes evident from the both the formal and informal discussions held between the two parties. For example, a letter from the Lebanese Foreign Office to United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA) stated: “The Lebanese government cannot avoid expressing its reprobation of the unjust measures taken with regard to the refugees, the effect of which is to impede their repatriation” (FRUS, 1951, p. 640).

By 1953, Lebanese officials held the view that a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict was impossible. For example, in 17 May 1953 Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Lebanese Parliament, Abdallah Bey Yafi suggested that the US “remove from its mind any possibility of Arab-Israeli peace, compel Israel to implement the UN Resolutions, and use its influence to stop immigration to Israel” (FRUS, 1953, p. 74). Some Lebanese officials believed that only a reduction in the US aid to Israel would lead to peace (FRUS, 1952–1954, p. 907). Others were convinced that any attempt to reach an agreement with Israel would have dire consequences and that neither the Palestinians nor the Arab states would be willing to accept it, and that the Muslims in Lebanon would regard it as a betrayal.

Highly pessimistic attitude prevailed among many Lebanese diplomats and government officials. For example, the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament told US Congressman Patrick J. Hillings: “Any Cabinet of either Lebanon, Syria or Jordan which makes a definite move toward *rapprochement* with Israel would fall before sunset.” He added, that “all we have to do is to give gushing spigot of US financial aid to Israel a quarter turn downward” (FRUS, 1953, p. 1316). Having to demonstrate its solidarity with the Arab states at a time when pan-Arabism was spreading in the region the Lebanese government warned US State Secretary John Foster Dulles not to meet Ben-Gurion in Jerusalem lest the Arabs would interpret such move as recognition of Jerusalem as the Jewish state’s capital (FRUS, 1953, p. 35).

Meanwhile, Ben-Gurion persisted in his conviction that Israel ought to look for ways to establish a Christian state in Lebanon. He contemplated tearing away the provinces of Tyre, Bekah and Tripoli from Lebanon and hoped to find Lebanese who were willing to work with Israel on this project. While Sharett remained skeptical about the feasibility of such plan, Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan opined that it could materialize with a little cooperation from the Maronites. He once told Sharett that if only Israel could buy one loyal Maronite officer it would be possible to annex the entire territory south of the Litani.⁹ Such bold assertion indicates clearly that the illustrious general was either oblivious or indifferent to the dangerous impact that connection with Israel could have on the relations between Christians and Muslims in Lebanon.

By 1955, it became abundantly clear that even though Lebanon was not negotiating peace with Israel, it sought stability along the border (FRUS, 1955, p. 177). However, fears over an Israeli attempt to gain control over the Litani River persisted (Ahmad, 1989, p. 166). When asked to explain why his country sought more weapons Foreign Minister Charles Malik cited Israel as a prime reason (FRUS, 1955–1957, p. 200). Indeed, Lebanon’s military force was too small and lacked the necessary training for major operations. Assessing Lebanon’s military power in the beginning of 1956, the US Ambassador to Lebanon Donald R. Heath had noted that its army of 7000 men was utterly incapable of major operations (FRUS, 1956, p. 184).

Many Lebanese were influenced by the pan-Arab sentiment which dominated the Middle East and tended to support the Syrian government’s position. However, when the issue of military cooperation with Syria was discussed by the parliament in November 1956 most Christians were against the proposal. Furthermore, when asked by the Israeli Ambassador whether Lebanon would allow Syrian troops to

cross its territory in case of a conflict with Israel, Elias Rababi reassured him that his government will refrain from doing so as long as Israel did not cause problems (ISA, 1956, July 19). As it turned out, however, the weakness of the Lebanese army enabled some militants to cross over into the Israeli territory and commit acts of terrorism and when that happened Ben-Gurion held the Lebanese government responsible (ISA, 1956, November 12).

The Lebanese leaders had distrust in Israel's intentions despite being reassured that its only intent was to maintain peace along the border. Camille Chamoun was one of numerous Lebanese politicians who were skeptical regarding Israel's assurances. He once told Heath that "Israel could never act in a friendly or Christian manner" (FRUS, 1956, p. 187). Generally, the Lebanese public remained either hostile or indifferent toward Israel. References to Israel among the Lebanese public remained few and far between. Shortly after the Suez War of 1956 the Lebanese public condemned Israel's role in the war and supported Eisenhower's pro-Egypt's policy (FRUS, 1956, p. 210). However, the Lebanese government deemed it necessary to act more firmly and when the Sinai Campaign was discussed in the General Assembly, Malik submitted a proposal denouncing Israel for its refusal to withdraw from the Egyptian territory and insisted that no foreign aid be given to it (Rosenthal et al., 2009, p. 623). Nevertheless, Ben-Gurion remained convinced that Lebanon had no real reason to have a conflict with Israel (Ben-Gurion, Government Yearbook, n.d., p. 101). But Malik had a fundamentally different view about Lebanon's role in the Middle East, which contradicted that of Ben-Gurion who saw the Jewish state as fulfilling a mediating role between East and West (Kewenig, 1965, p. 149).

Despite claims which were often made by critics, Ben-Gurion's vision of the "Promised Land" did not include Lebanon (Shalom & Ben-Gurion, 2005, p. 143). However, he did not abandon his plan to set the boundary at the Litani River (Ben-Gurion, 1996a, p. 329). His vision of Lebanon as a precarious republic persisted and led to him to continue advocating an alliance with the Maronites. Even after the US intervention in 1958 he doubted whether Lebanon's independence could be guaranteed because, as he put it, "most Muslims in Lebanon support Nasser, while the Christians are deeply divided" (Ben-Gurion, 1996a, p. 416).

Ben-Gurion's plan to establish contact with Lebanon became integrated into his Peripheral Alliance project which he shared with Eisenhower (Ben-Gurion, 1996a, p. 417). As it turned out, both plans failed to materialize and apart from sporadic meetings with representatives in these countries no consistent efforts were made by Israel to implement them. Both plans emanated from Ben-Gurion's concern that Nasser's pan-Arab ideas could spread quickly (Ben-Gurion, 1996a, p. 417). He also blamed Nasser for sending terrorists to attack Israel from the Lebanese border (Ben-Gurion, 1975a, p. 526).

It would be wrong however, to argue that the Lebanese government did not show a certain degree of willingness to reach a settlement with Israel even though it never expressed it openly. Indications for such desire can be found in the discourse with Lebanese politicians. For example, in his conversation with the French jurist René Cassin, Malik hinted that Lebanon would agree to a settlement of the Palestinian refugee problem if that would not significantly increase the size

of its Muslim population (Documents on Israeli Foreign Policy, 1957, January 15, p. 401). The Lebanese were concerned not only about the demographic change that the Palestinians' presence would cause in their country but also about the impact of Israel's expansion on their economy. Referring to the Zionist enterprise, Michel Chiha noted in his book *Palestine* that "great danger to our neighbors, and particularly to us, are involved in this insolent project for economic, financial, industrial and commercial domination, which can only lead to territorial and political violations" (Hani, 1983, p. 197).

By 1958, the conditions in Lebanon caused much alarm in Israel. In a message to the Foreign Ministry on 24 July 1958 Israel's Ambassador to the US Abba Eban noted that there was no guarantee that the presence of US force would save the country from Nasser's machinations (Documents on Israeli Foreign Policy, 2001, p. 45). Israel warned the US that failure to intervene in Lebanon would cause other countries to lose faith in the Eisenhower Doctrine (Heller, 2010, p. 262). In a letter to the Foreign Ministry, on 6 June 1958 Israeli Ambassador to Rome Eliyahu Sasson argued that the Lebanese authorities and their newspapers were challenging Nasser to resolve the Palestinian problem. These newspapers, and *Al-Amal* in particular, reminded him that Israel was his only enemy and that he ought to throw its inhabitants into the sea (ISA, 1958, June 6).

However, despite Nasser's popularity not all Lebanese approved of his meddling in their affairs. According to a report by the Israeli Merhav Society the Maronites asked its directors to urge the Israeli government to intervene on their behalf to prevent Nasser from dominating Lebanon (ISA, 1958, May 22). Moreover, the Maronites feared that the political changes which Lebanon underwent at that time might have adverse effect of their ability to dominate the country. They were particularly concerned about the publication of the Lebanese electoral law of 1960, which increased the number of parliament members from 66 to 99, fearing that Nasser would be able to use the additional members to increase his influence in the country (ISA, 1960, April 14). Under these conditions it was hardly surprising that the notion of forging close Israeli–Maronite alliance was not cast aside even though little was done to promote it. The official policy of the Lebanese regime remained hostile to Israel but the contacts did not cease. This was a period of considerable tension and forced the Lebanese government to demonstrate solidarity with common Arab concerns (ISA, 1960, January 20).

The Arrival of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) into Lebanon and the Changing Israeli Strategy

Sporadic meetings were held with Lebanese leaders but nothing concrete was decided upon until after the Lebanese Civil War. Meanwhile, the infiltration of Palestinian guerrilla fighters to Israel through Lebanese territory had adverse effects on the bilateral relations. The Israeli raid on 28 December 1968 brought the tension between the two countries to a new height. Known as Operation Gift (*Teshura*) this raid came in response to an attack on an Israeli airliner by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) 2 days earlier and resulted in

the destruction of 13 Lebanese aircraft. This attack on a sovereign country could hardly be justified. The Palestinian raids into Israeli territory continued to cause tension and culminated in another Israeli invasion of Lebanon on 9 April 1973 known as Operation Spring of Youth (*Aviv Ne'urim*) in which several Palestinian leaders were killed. Whether or not it was appropriate to continue holding Lebanon responsible for raids coming from its territory will continue to be debated but there is no doubt that by doing so Israel violated Lebanon's sovereignty making it more difficult to obtain its goal of concluding a peace treaty with that country.

Israel's policy did not change when the right-wing Likud party came to power in 1977. Referring to the commitment to support the Maronites, Prime Minister Menachem Begin said, "We will come to the aid of any persecuted minority in the Middle East" (Avney, 2018, p. 333). The PLO operations against Israel and the bombardment of the northern cities brought the government to think more seriously about the Maronites whom the new leaders believed would be willing to sign a peace treaty with Israel. As it turned out, even the most enthusiastic among the Maronites did not speak about a peace treaty with Israel. The Israeli operations that ensued caused mayhem in Lebanon but failed to dislodge the Palestinians from their positions. The sense of disillusionment was not limited to Lebanese officials but spread to the general public. For example, in a letter to Prime Minister Golda Meir a Lebanese Christian expressed suspicion of Israel's aims, which many Christians shared and argued: "There must be something going on between you and Syria for the overthrow of the Christian Lebanese government-Syria take the north and Israel the south" (ISA, 1969, November 4).

The presence of the PLO in Lebanon was a major factor leading to the outbreak of the civil war. Supported by left wing groups, the PLO fought against the conservatives and despite Syrian intervention it remained strong in southern Lebanon. In 1976, Israel began aiding the Christians in response to an invitation by Sa'ad Haddad and Samir Shidyaq, two generals who sought protection from the Palestinians. With US approval, Israel began to send arms to the Christians.¹⁰ In 1977, the Israel Public Committee for Aiding Lebanon was formed (CZA, 1977, August 20). It provided medical care and supplies to those who crossed the border (CZA, 1978, February 9). When the Syrian army clashed with the Lebanese Front in Beirut in July 1978, Begin warned that Israel would not abandon its Christian friends (Reilly, 1982, p. 18). However, none of these actions helped win hearts and minds in Lebanon. When called upon by the Christian commanders to consider the possibility of collaboration with Israel, President Elias Sarkis warned them that the Israelis would abandon them "in the middle of the road" if it was in their interests to do so and that Israel's objective was to settle the Palestinians in Lebanon (Ashquti, 1994, pp. 130–131).

In September 1980, Syrian forces entered Zahla and a battle between them and the Lebanese forces ensued. Israel announced that coming to their rescue constituted a moral obligation. In April 1981, Syria placed antiaircraft SAM 6 missiles in the Bekah valley. The US sent Lebanese envoy Philip Habib to mediate but his mission failed and Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 (Hāsān, 2008, pp. 219–220). When the Peace of Galilee Operation began Israel benefited from the sympathy of the Shi'a population. Anxious to rid themselves of the Palestinian

warriors whom they regarded as disrupting their lives, the Shi'a viewed the Israeli occupation favorably. However, the cooperation with Israel came to an end on 6 June 1983 when the Amal organization declared a day of mourning and a general strike against the Israeli occupation. What led to this shift was the fact that they did not see an end to the occupation. In addition, Israel's practice of dumping agricultural products had adverse effect on the local autonomy (Sayigh, 1994, pp. 146–147).

The war of 1982 led not only to resentment against the Israeli invader but also to a major cultural shock. The Israelis and the Lebanese were shocked at the sight of each other in the battlefield. While the Israelis regarded them as Arabs, the Lebanese soldiers were shocked at the sight of swarthy Israelis many of whom looked like Arabs. Moreover, the harsh regulations imposed by the government increased the tension further. For example, Lebanese girls were warned not to fraternize with the Israelis and that kept them apart (Randal, 1984, p. 258).

In the aftermath of the invasion, Israel created two stretches of Christian territory along the border to which it provided aid. This arrangement emanated from the ambiguity of its policy which regarded Lebanon as a sovereign county incapable of defending itself or as one scholar put it, a "non-state state" (Sela, 2007, p. 59). This arrangement became known as the "Good Fence" policy. When General Ariel Sharon joined Begin's government as defense minister, his objective was to evict the PLO from Lebanon and install Bashir Gemayel as president (Schiff, 1984, p. 327). A secret meeting between Gemayel, Begin and Sharon took place in Nahariya, close to the Lebanese border on 1 September 1982 but the differences between the two sides were evident immediately. One of the main stumbling blocks was Gemayel's insistence that Haddad be brought to trial for treason for operating from an area controlled by Israel. Neither Begin nor Sharon were willing to comply and the prospects of cooperation with Israel dwindled considerably thereafter (Nakhleh, 1982, p. 327).

During the war Israel supported the Phalangists whom it called 'the Lebanese forces' (Fisk, 1990, p. 274). It announced that it had no interest in interfering in the sectarian strife but supported the Christian regiments with the hope that they would be deployed in the locations that it planned to evacuate (Al-Alfi, 1984, p. 109). There were numerous critics who thought that the Israeli invasion was miscalculated. For example, one writer argued that "By betting on more than one community at a time ... the Israelis lost all the assets that they had in Lebanon in 1982" (Anbouy, 1984, p. 36).

Sharon who was blamed for the massacre of Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila was one of Israel's most hawkish leaders who argued that there must be continued Israeli presence in south Lebanon (Simon & Stevenson, 2011, p. 33). His indifference caused the massacre of 700 innocent Palestinians by the Phalangists. Particularly outraged was an Arab Knesset member who argued even before the massacre that both Palestinians and Lebanese were tortured by the Israelis (*Knesset Debate*, 1982, July 14, p. 3185). While the extent of the atrocities may have been exaggerated, there is little doubt that Israel gave little thought to the consequences of the invasion. Nor was there any serious attempt made by Israel to coordinate the invasion with the Phalangists. Joseph Abu Khalil recalled that "the plan of the

Israeli government and the military command remained oblivious to us," and that Sharon "did not share with us in the preparation for the operation," and that we "did not personally ask for such participation" (Abū Khālīl, 1990, p. 198).

Kirsten E. Schulze's analysis of the debacle in Lebanon provides a basic understanding of the reasons why the operation ended in dismal failure. Basing her analysis on the premise that leaders embarking on a military operation act differently when they are part of a decision-making group she demonstrates how individuals within the group are constrained and influenced by each other. The inevitable outcome is that their decision to carry out the mission and the methods that they employ become a product of the entire group. If made by a single leader both the planning and the execution can have a different outcome. Factors such as recklessness, misjudgment, ignorance, simplistic thinking, bias and other tendencies can have a profound impact on a group.

The Israeli elite who made the decision to go to war and those who carried it out consisted of only a handful of personalities apart from Begin and Sharon. These were Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Chief of Staff Raphael Eytan, the Cabinet, Mossad, and the Military intelligence. By interacting with each other the entire group was affected by the strengths and weaknesses of each individual and the interaction among them resulted in false assumptions, overconfidence, lack of attention to details, miscalculations and other traits that could easily lead to disaster. The consensus among the members was that military force could achieve long term political goals. Furthermore, the group had assumed that the Maronites were reliable and no one thought that their ties with Israel were based entirely on expediency. No systematic study of Lebanon's demography or assessment of the Maronite military capabilities was carried out and not all the participants cooperated with each other. All this inevitably led to a fiasco. (Schulze, 1998, pp. 216–221, 226–227, 229–230).

The Aftermath of Operation Peace for the Galilee

Despite its traditional hostility toward the Jewish state, Lebanon had consistently agreed to comprehensive negotiations with a view to resolve the Palestinian problem. For example, when the idea of convening an international conference to resolve the Palestinian problem was debated in 1984 the government stated that the 1949 Armistice with Israel was still in force and asked to participate in it. By doing so, Bashir Gemayel sought to end the Israeli presence without waiting for a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian problem, which could have delayed its withdrawal (Naor, 1988, p. 141).

Since 1976 Bashir Gemayel was in favor of links with Israel. However, what stood on the way was Israel's pressure to conclude a peace treaty immediately, and settle 400,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon while Bashir insisted that they return to their historic homeland. Bashir's assassination in September 1982 was another major blow to Israel's endeavor to install a Christian regime in Lebanon. It brought many Christian Lebanese to reassess their informal ties with Israel and to promote better ties with the Muslims. Following Bashir's assassination his

brother Amine became the new candidate for the presidential elections which were rescheduled for September 21. Both Chamoun and Éddé contested the election but since the latter was in exile in Paris, he obtained little support. Therefore, the only serious contestant to Amine was Chamoun. The assassination brought some of Chamoun's supporters and some of Bashir's militia members who were known for tendency to ally with Israel to split from the Gemayel family. Together with Haddad's troops they backed Chamoun's candidacy. Moreover, some of Amine's family members were convinced that Israel was behind the assassination and the fact that the suspect, Dib Anastas was known for his sympathy to the Israeli-Haddad-Chamoun alliance lent more credence to their suspicion (Cobban, 1982, September 21).

The American-brokered agreement of 17 May 1983, which called for the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from Beirut established a framework for normal relations between the two countries but was revoked by the Lebanese government due to mounting opposition from the Muslims and the Arab press which portrayed it as surrender to Israel. The pressure exerted by Israel to allow it to occupy the southern part of Lebanon was the main reason which led to the failure of US diplomacy. Meanwhile, contacts between Israel and the Christians continued in a haphazard fashion. Occasionally, personalities of little influence expressed their support for the idea. For example, the commander of the Lebanese forces Fadi Ifram told *Al-Safir* on 18 August 1984 that the Christians in Lebanon and the Jewish people ought to formulate a common strategy. However, Maronites both in the government and in the church remained opposed to the idea. For example, Father Yusuf Munis said in an interview to Joseph Badawi of *Al-Afkar* on 26 November 1984 that the Christians were not willing to divide the country and that they opposed a dialogue with Israel.

The Shi'a and the Impact of Hezbollah on the Normalization Process

As soon as the initial joy of the Shi'a population subsided, they became the sworn enemy of the Israeli invader. Intensifying this tendency was the emergence of Hezbollah in the early 1980s. Hezbollah's origins can be partially attributed to Iran's quest for hegemony in the Middle East after the Islamic revolution of 1979. Hezbollah's goal according to its leaders was to rid the country from foreign colonial Western and Zionist influence. In addition, it became involved in grass root activities which were designed to give it legitimacy.

Known initially as *Harakat al-Mahrūmīn* (Movement of the Deprived) Hezbollah built an efficient armed corps and its leaders embarked on parliamentary struggle which turned it into a political party to be reckoned with. Hezbollah demanded that Israel evacuate the Shab'a Farms in the vicinity of the Golan Heights, which Israel captured from Syria in the Six-Day War of 1967. Israel repeatedly argued that this territory was captured from Syria and that it would become a subject of negotiations only in the framework of a peace treaty with

Syria. Hezbollah's claim to these territories provided it *raison d'être* and popularity in Lebanon. Its relentless assaults on American targets added to the mayhem and demonstrated that an Israeli intervention would be unlikely to yield positive results (Norton, 2000, pp. 23, 25). The Israeli–Lebanese relations became marred by Hezbollah's actions and Syrian intervention. Despite its efforts to mend fences with Lebanon, Israel never went to the extent of absolving it from all responsibility for Hezbollah's activities.¹¹ Consequently, there was no possibility to improve the bilateral ties in a meaningful way.

The PLO raids continued in the following years, leading the Israelis to embark on yet another campaign known as Operation Grapes of Wrath in 1996 and it was not until Labor Prime Minister Ehud Barak decided to withdraw from Lebanon on 23–24 May 2000 that the Israeli presence ended. Although there was no longer talk about an alliance between Israel and the Maronites, the option of making peace with Israel did not entirely vanish and was occasionally mentioned by the Lebanese leaders (Maroun, 2016, September 18). As it turned out, Israel's departure did not bring an end to its intervention. Neither was Israel successful in winning hearts and minds among the Druze population. Former Israel's Prime Minister Shimon Peres recalled in his memoirs how he helped Walid Jumblatt, leader of the Lebanese Socialist Party and the Druze community escape from house arrest during the war only to be snubbed by him shortly afterwards (Peres, 1995, pp. 220–221). Only a few Lebanese shared Haddad's comments at a press conference which took place in Tel Aviv on 17 April 1997 that Israel "opened her heart to us".

The clashes between Israel and the Hezbollah eventually led to a major war in 2006 in which both sides claimed victory. In a speech celebrating his victory over the Israeli army its leader Hasan Nasrallah warned the Lebanese government against any attempt to normalize relations saying that "Israel is not interested and does not care about anyone in Lebanon" and that "We Muslims and Christians are in the eyes of these Zionists no more than servants and slaves of God's chosen people" (*Al-Sadr*, 2007, p. 535). Echoing these sentiments were frequent comments made by Sunni as well as Shi'a clerics. For example, Shaikh Saeed Sha'ban blamed the Israeli government and the Maronites for uniting against the Lebanese people (*Al-'Ahd*, 1989, October 7).

Nevertheless, in 1984 Amine Gemayel delivered a firm speech in which he expressed his determination to end the Israeli occupation and regain the Shab'a Farms. Although he demanded a time table for compete withdrawal he seemed to provide a hopeful note for the future of the bilateral relations when he said, "We hope the anticipated withdrawal of Israeli forces will bring about a period of renewed reconciliation and reconstruction, as well as the restoration of a precious part of our country" (Gemayel, 1984, p. 134). However, the hostility toward Israel remained strong among and many regard Israel as a country seeking to surpass all others. For example, asked about the possibility that his country would be eclipsed by Israel economically the Lebanese cleric Muhammad Hussein Fadlallāh rejected that possibility saying that Israel would never be in a position to surpass Lebanon since it has no roots in the region (Fadlallāh, 2001, p. 336). And when asked why

he demanded that the Vatican rescind its recognition of Israel, Fadlallāh said that the Jewish state was established in the wake of the eviction of the Palestinians from their homes (Fadlallāh, 2001, pp. 408–409).

Washington's attempts to bring the hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah to an end failed after US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice held several meetings. In his meeting with a US envoy Elias Siniora reiterated that the most important issue was the Shab'a Farms. He suggested that Israel allow the UN to administer them until the international tribunal decide to which country they belong. However, when Rice brought the issue before Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, he turned down the proposal saying that it would be a dangerous step since it came after resistance to Israeli control (Al-Sadr to Nasrallah, 2007, p. 514).

Writing in June 2016 Robert Fisk argued that the relationship between Israel and Lebanon were deteriorating again (Fisk, *Independent*, 2016, June 23). Little did anyone know that 3 years later even the most pessimists turned hopeful. The recent efforts by the US to encourage a dialogue between the two countries are not likely to eliminate the popularly held conviction that the Trump administration seeks to impose a solution to the Arab-Palestinian problem favorable to Israel.¹² However, the desire of both countries to exploit the oil and natural gas along their maritime borders brought them to embark on a new round of negotiations. Recently, the US became involved in bringing the two countries to the negotiations table and the Lebanese foreign ministry announced that both sides are close to an agreement delineating the maritime border. The Lebanese government seems willing to reach an agreement but it wants to add the Shab'a Farms to the discourse. According to the Israeli government analyst Amir Oren the two sides have been negotiating for quite some time and Lebanon insists that the US play a major role and that both sides seem interested in benefitting from the natural resources. According to Oren, Hezbollah was caught by surprise but agreed to act as an observer without participating in the discussions and so far, the Israelis seem more optimistic about the outcome of the negotiations (Al-Kassim, 2019, June 9).

Conclusion

Israel's relations with Lebanon were under constant change throughout the years covered in this essay. Its attitude toward the Jewish state was determined by both domestic and external factors over which the ruling Christian government had little control. Although the country had been under Christian rule since its establishment no Lebanese government was in a position to alienate the Muslim population by openly establishing ties with Israel. This explains why the talk about alliance between Jews and Lebanese did not lead anywhere despite the numerous contacts. Neither the Israelis nor the Maronites were fully committed to the idea and the fact that the pro-Arab proponents of 'Greater Lebanon' gained the upper hand in the struggle against the proponents of a small state allied to France discouraged the Maronites from pursuing the plan (Zisser, 1995, pp. 890–891, 893, 914).

Israeli leaders talked about the idea without being fully committed to it and the personalities that they contacted had little influence (McCullum, 2007, pp. 926, 928–929, 933–934). Moreover, the contacts remained confined to politicians and military leaders and rarely to Maronite church officials. Israel's return to Lebanon in the aftermath of the Civil War and its attempt to interest the Maronites in an alliance ended in failure largely as a result of the demographic changes, which made it clear that the Christians were no longer in charge and that no amount of foreign aid could reverse that trend.

While it is difficult to say whether or not the bilateral relations would have followed a different course without the demographic changes which took place in the Shi'a community and the emergence of Hezbollah, one can argue that these developments had prevented any possibility of better understanding between the two countries for the last four decades. Nevertheless, it is likely that the recent negotiations between the countries regarding the need to settle the dispute over the natural gas would lead to better understanding between the two countries despite Hezbollah's objection and Shi'a hostility.

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Notes

1. Views expressed in this paper are of the author's and not of the Air Force Academy.
2. The Maronites are Christians who follow the teachings of the fifth century ascetic Saint Maroun who founded a monastery on the Orontes River in Syria in 452. Saint Maroun and his disciples adhered to the resolution of the Council of Chalcedon, which convened in 451 and determined that Jesus Christ had both human and divine natures united in one person, and thereby became heretics in the eyes of the Monophysites who insisted that Christ has only one, divine nature. Escaping persecutions by those who opposed their doctrine they migrated southward toward Lebanon and some reached Palestine. Persecuted by the Byzantines and the Arab conquerors their condition did not improve until the rise of the Ottoman Empire which regarded them as *dhimmis* or 'people of the Book' but even then they were regarded with suspicion for their connection with Catholic France. In 1864 the Ottomans established a sectarian system in Lebanon with an appointed Maronite governor. In 1926, the Republic of Lebanon was given a constitution but the French remained in control until 1943, when the Lebanese factions proclaimed the National Pact, which determined that the president would always be Maronite, the prime minister Muslim and the speaker of the house Shi'i. However, it was not until 17 April 1946 that the country became independent. Ever since, the country was ruled by the Maronites despite the demographic changes which resulted in a significant increase in the Muslim population. Unlike other Christian sects the Maronites are not divided into Catholic and Greek Orthodox. They are all Catholics and presently there is a Maronite community of nearly 11,000 souls in Israel's northern Galilee region.

3. While Ben-Gurion tried to convince him of the feasibility of creating a Christian-Maronite state allied to Israel in the southern part of Lebanon, Sharett rejected the idea outright (Shlaim, 1983).
4. For example, in his critique of the government one writer criticized the government for allowing an Armenian representative to become a minister for the third time while denying the members of the Christian communities the possibility of reaching such positions. He writes: "It is regrettable that Lebanon that speaks in the name of dignity and human rights treats the Christian minorities with such alienation while Christians are being represented in every government in Iraq, both in the past and the present, in the region of Kurdistan and in Syria, and even the Turkish parliament elected a Christian." (Afram, 2013).
5. For example, Monseigneur Augustine Harpush who witnessed Israel's attempt to help the Maronites during Begin's incumbency remained grateful to Israel. Harpush to Begin, CZA S38/319/1347, 13 July 1978.
6. For a full text of the agreement see *Palestine Post*, 24 March 1949.
7. The documents pertaining to this appeal were uncovered and published by the historian Benny Morris in July 1983 (Shipley, 1983, July 3).
8. ISA, FM2408/10. Cited in Barak, p. 167.
9. Cited in Israel's new order in Lebanon (1992).
10. The role that the US played in this episode becomes clear when one considers Kissinger's admission that "The Christians are getting arms from Israel which we do not oppose since it helps maintain the balance." National Security Council Meeting Minutes, 7 April 1976. Declassified. Cited in Abdel-Kader (2007, July).
11. Comments made by Yitzhak Rabin to the Israeli Television (Murden, 2000).
12. In a recent article published in the Lebanese weekly *Al-Aman* the author argues that the recent efforts of the Trump administration to reach Lebanon is meant to set the stage for the imposition of the "deal of the century" between Israel and the Palestinians and serve its other interests in the region. Bayn tarsīm al-hūdūd al-bahriyah wa-ṣafqat al-qarn: mādhā yūridū al-amriki ziyyaratahu al-mutakararah ila Lubnān? [Between marking the sea borders and the "deal of the century": What does the American want to achieve by repeatedly visiting Lebanon?]. *Al-Aman* (Beirut), 29 May 2019.

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